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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000314

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [ECON](#) [PINR](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: DIWANIYAH CALM AFTER ELECTIONS, DA'WA SET TO  
REPLACE ISCI

Classified By: PRT Team Leader Michael Klecheski for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Following peaceful voting in Diwaniyah Province, calm has prevailed as voters await preliminary and final results. Preliminary results, released February 5, show that Prime Minister Maliki's State of Law coalition came in first with over 23 percent of the vote. ISCI, which currently controls the provincial government, finished a distant second. Governor Khudari (ISCI) has shown his irritation about rumors circulating about him, but in a private conversation with us on the morning before the results were released, appeared resigned to stepping down in orderly fashion. Directors General (DG) have been skittish about the transition but continue their work. Speculation on the next governor currently centers on the head of Diwaniyah's Da'wa party. ISCI's relatively weak showing is generally attributed to its ineffectiveness in providing essential services, although even an ISCI-affiliated source told us the public had become tired of that party's religiosity. End Summary.

Few Claims of Fraud, but Some Nasty Rumors  
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¶2. (SBU) The positive mood set by the incident-free voting in Diwaniyah Province on January 28 and 31 has persisted as voters await election results. We heard few accusations of irregularities in the voting other than the Imam of ISCI-affiliated Diwaniyah City's Al-Hakeem Mosque, who said in a radio interview that many people had been unable to find their names on voter lists and been unable to cast their ballots. That imam also charged that the U.S. had interfered in the province's election (which echoes his long-standing anti-Americanism).

¶3. (C) Beyond such relatively isolated voices, a few rumors about the governor and his administration soured the positive mood slightly. During a February 4 Provincial Security Council meeting, Governor Khudari expressed anger about rumors in the media that he had been arrested by security forces right after the election and that the provincial police chief had been demoted. Rumors have also swirled that the governor's chief economic advisor, an Australian citizen of Iraqi descent, fled back to Australia immediately after the election; in a radio interview, however, that advisor said he had simply gone to Egypt for a conference, although suspicions persist that he will not return.

Prospects for a New Governor  
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¶4. (C) In a meeting with us early on February 5, Governor Khudari implicitly acknowledged that his party had been defeated in the provincial election and suggested that he would likely step down. Predicting that no party would gain a majority in the PC, Khudari said the choice of governor and PC chair would be made by coalition-building but implied that his ISCI party would likely have a limited voice in that process. The preliminary results released by the Independent

High Electoral Commission (IHEC) later in the day confirmed what had been expected: the Da'wa-led State of Law Coalition won with over 23 percent of the vote, while ISCI was a distant second with over 11 percent.

15. (C) Even before word of a Da'wa/State of Law victory started to spread, speculation about the next governor had generally centered on Diwaniyah's Da'wa Party leader, Salim Hussein Alwan, a former Iraqi Army officer. Prior to provincial voting, one of Diwaniyah's leading sheikhs (of the Fatlah tribe) had informed us of Mr. Salim's potential ascension to the provincial governorship. While Da'wa appears poised to take over the province's top executive job, a candidate from Allawi's Iraqi National Accord-backed list, Abd Muslim al-Ghazi, has been mentioned as the most likely candidate for PC Chair. Muslim, a current member of the PC, has maintained fairly regular contact with the PRT in the past, but has demonstrated a shallow and immature understanding of politics. Allawi's list placed fourth in the province with eight percent of the vote, slightly behind ex-Prime Minister Ibrahim Jaafari's party and slightly ahead of fifth-place Tayar al-Ahrar, the leading Sadrism party.

#### A Nervous Bureaucracy

16. (C) There also is speculation that at least some of the DGs will be replaced once a new governor assumes office. Whether accurate or not, such rumors will likely lead to a drop-off in government activity during the transition. After our long-standing efforts to establish an Agricultural Advisory Council finally appeared to have come to fruition

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shortly before the election, we have now heard reports that several of the DGs fear attending its first meeting because of uncertainty about the preferences of the future governor, and want to delay the Council's start-up. One of the governor's key advisors, however, still insists it will meet within two weeks.

#### ISCI's Troubles

17. (C) Meanwhile, discussion also centers on why ISCI did not score well in the election. The ISCI-controlled government's failure to effectively provide essential services is the prime explanation. A contact whose family is closely tied to ISCI and the Badr Corps, however, argued that people had tired of having their lifestyles restricted by Islamic principles. In her view, people's desire to choose for themselves the extent that religion would shape their lives accounted for ISCI's poor showing and showed that Diwaniyah's population was gaining political maturity.

#### Comment

18. (C) The atmosphere to date has been calm, and the Governor gave every impression, at least in his conversation with us, that he was committed to a smooth, peaceful transition. This in no way precludes trouble ahead once the jockeying for key positions really gets going. So far, however, developments have been relatively encouraging.  
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